

The Power of Books

Francina Mutilifa plans to pursue her dream of becoming a lawyer, but as a 10th grader at Rehoboth High School, she is already facing a number of challenges. The school, which is 91 kilometers south of Windhoek, Namibia, has never had enough textbooks for students to use at home. Francina, like many of her classmates, is sometimes rushed to do homework in class and then must finish her work at home, without the benefit of her textbooks.

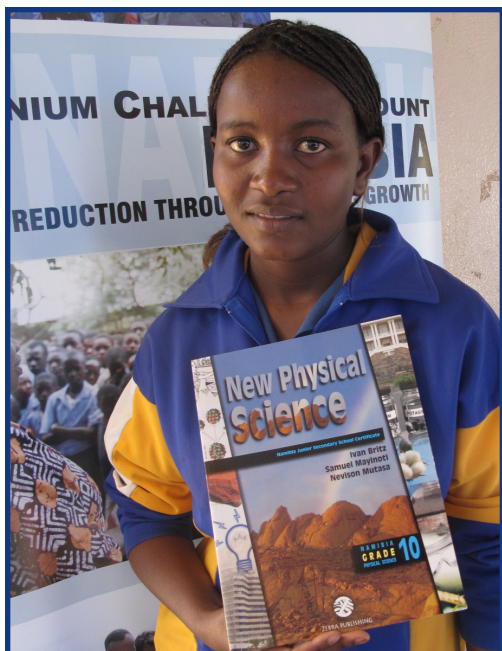
Francina and her classmates are not the only students who suffer from a lack of instructional materials. Shortages of books and other materials in primary and secondary schools are prevalent throughout Africa, including in Namibia. In Namibian primary schools, an insufficient number of textbooks creates a difficult learning environment, both in the classroom and at home after the school day ends. In some classes, as many as seven students share the same textbook.

One of the critical constraints to economic growth in Namibia is an inadequately educated and skilled workforce. In addressing this constraint to growth, the U.S. Government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is investing \$144.9 million as part of a \$304.5 million five-year compact with the Government of Namibia to improve the quality of the Namibian workforce by enhancing the equity and effectiveness of primary, secondary and vocational education.

A recent study conducted by an outside consultant and funded by MCC confirmed that a serious textbook shortage exists in Namibia, both by grade and by subject. To address this shortage, MCC has provided funding to deliver hundreds of thousands of books in the short-term, and is working with the Ministry of Education to implement a



Francina Mutilifa receives one of more than 695,000 textbooks purchased as part of MCC's compact with Namibia.



Francina Mutilifa proudly holds her new Physical Science textbook.

new, sustainable management system to standardize the procurement and distribution of textbooks throughout the country.

This process has been highly consultative, with major stakeholders reaching consensus on the new policies and procedures. Stakeholders have worked closely with the National Institute for Educational Development and the newly-created National Textbook Board to implement these policies and with the Supply Chain Management Unit, which was created to oversee the ordering, distribution and delivery of textbooks.

Strong management, recordkeeping and transparency are essential to ensure fairness in textbook allocation and to build trust in the system. Standardizing and simplifying the existing complicated procedures will help schools order the appropriate books at the best prices, have them delivered to the right place at the right time and minimize misuse of government resources. A second round of MCC-funded textbooks, which will be shipped once these systems are in place, will test the new procedures and guidelines.

The difference these textbooks is making can be seen on students' faces. On June 7, Francina held her new Physical Science textbook with pride. "I'm very happy; at least now I will be able to do my homework and pass with better scores," she said. The principal at the Omuthiya-Lipundi Senior Secondary School, which recently received its shipment of books, claimed, "After so many years in service, I never thought that one day, this dream of one-to-one ratio in textbooks would be a reality."